



for  
married  
women  
only

Three  
Principles  
for Honoring  
Your Husband



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# THE SANCTITY OF SURRENDER

## SURRENDERING TO YOUR HUSBAND

Jesus' example on the cross helps us see what it means to surrender to God's divine plan. Christ willingly lay down on the cross and stretched out His arms to be nailed because it was the will of His Father.

There are, no doubt, many wives who would say they feel almost as though they're being crucified by their marriages. From their perspective, it seems as if they are being asked to lie down, stretch out their arms, and surrender themselves to their husbands, who may or may not appreciate their sacrifice and treat them accordingly. It is normal to fear that act of surrender.

Since no husband and no marriage is perfect, the issue of surrender is a difficult one for many wives. That's because, as we have seen, God calls a wife to respect and

submit to her husband even when he may not be worthy of her respect or when there is a difference of opinion and the wife has a valid point. She must honor her husband's position as head of the home in order to accomplish a common program.

And when a wife does this out of respect for her husband and obedience to God, He responds to her obedience and liberates her from her fears. That's the point I want us to see in 1 Peter 3:5–6, the final two verses in the passage we are looking at that is devoted to wives.

We would all like to be liberated. But there are too many women, even in the family of God, who are prisoners of their own rebellion and stubbornness because they refuse to recognize or yield to the divine order for marriage.

Instead of doing things God's way and trusting Him for the results, these women are using their tongues to dishonor and put down their husbands in the hope that they can break free from what they perceive as the bondage of marriage. But instead of freedom, they find themselves still stranded in a bad situation, because God will never honor rebellion.

The Bible says that a wife who honors God creates an opportunity to win her husband over without lecturing, griping, or demeaning him. However, that a husband will eventually come around is a general principle and not guaranteed. The possibility is hard for some wives to believe, because they don't see any way their husbands will ever come around without their intervention. But this is

what God says, so the question for Christian wives is whether they are going to let God be true even if everyone else is found to be a liar (see Romans 3:4).

There should be plenty of wives ready to give God's way a try, because they've been trying it their way for years and it hasn't worked yet. Lasting spiritual change is the work of God the Holy Spirit, not the product of our efforts.

Peter went back into biblical history to point out some women who understood this principle and put it to work in their lives. "For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands" (1 Peter 3:5).

### MODELS OF GODLY SURRENDER

Part of the problem we're dealing with today in marriage is the lack of godly examples of husbands and wives who are doing marriage by the Book and seeing God honor their relationship. In this no-absolutes, no-rules generation, it's getting harder and harder to find real-life examples of what God designed marriage to be. In one sense this shouldn't surprise us, because we've already seen that a holy woman is rare, like a precious jewel. And I might add that holy men are just as rare. Now in the context of 1 Peter 3, a holy woman is someone who trusts in God and is submissive to her husband, truly honoring and respecting him.

Let's make sure we understand what's being said here. A woman who disrespects her husband and dishonors his position cannot be considered a holy woman in God's sight. By disrespecting him, she is disrespecting God. "Holy" means set apart for God, which is an internal, invisible, spiritual commitment that is made in the heart.

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But the Bible also says that we can tell what is in people's hearts by their words and actions. These women of old who trusted God and were set apart for Him demonstrated their faith by the way they honored their husbands through both their words and their actions.

The point is inescapable. Ladies, don't tell me you are close to God while you are in rebellion against your husband's leadership, putting him down and battling him for

control. The Bible says the women who were set apart to be "rare" and "holy" didn't do that. They respected their husbands, even if they didn't always agree with them. They did this because they trusted God.

In some cases, mothers are setting their daughters up to dishonor their future husbands by offering them an example of this through their own lives.

We've got a distorted view on marriage, unfortunately. I go deeper into the purpose of marriage in the companion guide on covenant marriage, but let me mention here that marriage is about accomplishing the purpose of God in your life.

The marriage covenant was designed by God to strengthen the capability of each partner to rule the sphere where God has placed them. Marriage is a means to greater dominion over the life God has given you. In order to carry out the greatest influence in your life, it is important for both partners to work together.

Adam was to offer leadership through being the provider, the protector, and the priest. Eve was fashioned to fit into the picture of dominion by being a helper who could contribute to him. God said of Adam's need for a mate, "I will make him a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18).

## WHAT IT MEANS TO HELP

Let's start with the men on this one. When some men hear the word "helper," they think of someone who is

going to cook, clean, do the laundry, and keep the kids quiet while he watches his ball game.

Television sitcoms are full of these marriage portrayals, and the programs usually get a lot of laughs. But there's nothing funny about a husband who interprets "helper" simply as a maid, cook, and babysitter. A woman doesn't have to be a wife to fulfill any of these roles. You can hire people to do these tasks.

Now don't misunderstand. This doesn't mean a wife can neglect or pass off her obligations at home. There is no substitute for her touch in the home, but if that's all her role consists of, then something is wrong because this is not the primary way that a wife serves as a helper to her husband.

The primary way that a wife helps her husband is to help him become the leader that God has appointed him to be. A wife ought to be her husband's chief fan, chief encourager, and chief support system. But she can't help her husband take the lead if she is constantly tearing him down or fighting him for control.

In the Bible, a helper is someone who comes alongside another person to lift and build that person up. Jesus called the Holy Spirit our "Helper" in John 14:16. The Spirit's role is a good example of the way a helper works. Jesus said that the Spirit would not magnify Himself, but would glorify Jesus (John 16:13–14).

Now a wife may be saying, "If that's what being a helper means, I don't want to do it. Why should I spend my time glorifying my husband and lifting him up? The

only way I can do that is by denying myself and my gifts and becoming my husband's doormat. If he gets all the glory, that means I don't get any. Besides, I've got more education and a better job than he has."

That assessment may seem harsh, but it's exactly how some wives view the idea of being their husbands' helpers. Is it an accurate assessment? Not at all, and the Holy Spirit's position in the Godhead proves it.

The Spirit is coequal in essence with the Father and the Son. He lost nothing of His deity when He became the Helper and took the role of glorifying Christ. This was a voluntary submission among spiritual equals, just as Christ's submission to the Father during His earthly ministry was a voluntary submission to accomplish the plan of redemption.

A wife who is committed to obey God and live as a holy woman before Him does not have to surrender her person to honor and submit to her husband. In fact, any husband with any sense is going to turn around and honor and lift up his wife when he is empowered by her to take the role God called him to fulfill.

If being a helper honors God and builds up their marriages, why aren't more wives doing this? Because they aren't hanging out with the holy women. Instead, they're getting their input from their unholy girlfriends, watching unholy television, listening to unholy radio, and reading unholy books. Peter said that a woman who wants to get this marriage thing right needs to be spending time in the right company.



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Where is a Christian wife, particularly a young woman who is new in her marriage, going to find holy women like this? The Bible says she ought to be finding them in the church:

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.

(Titus 2:3–5)

The older women in view here are not only those further along in age, but women who are spiritually mature and able to offer a godly example. You don't go to a person

who has been married for five months, or married five times, for advice on how to respect and submit to your husband.

What a lot of Christian wives need are godly women who won't be telling them, "Girl, I'd leave him if I were you," or, "I wouldn't take that," when times get tough.

Of course, we're not talking about a wife enduring beatings and abuse from a husband who is out of control because she thinks that's what God wants her to do. There is no excuse for abusive behavior. But a wife who wants to fulfill her biblical calling and be a helper to her husband needs holy women who are going to give her holy information on what it means to be a holy wife.

Titus 2:5 gives us the ultimate motivation for wives to help build godly marriages. God isn't concerned about a woman pleasing her society friends or her feminist co-workers. His concern is the honor of His Word and the glory of His name. When marriages are out of sync with God's will, disaster is waiting to happen. God's name is at risk of being dishonored.

### SATAN'S GREAT REVERSAL

We can see this disaster unfold in the first marriage in history. In his temptation of Eve in the garden of Eden, Satan persuaded her to disregard and ignore Adam and assume the role of headship Adam was supposed to play (see Genesis 3:1–6).

Adam was at fault for his lack of leadership, and the

Bible lays the ultimate responsibility for the entrance of sin at his feet. Every man will be held accountable for how he handles what happens in his home. God will not ask a husband about his wife but about what he did with the responsibility of leadership that he was given. As the head, a husband's job is to manage the home through addressing what takes place in it with a view to how that aligns with the Word of God.

But Eve's actions in Eden still played a critical role in helping create this disaster. The reason I say that Eve ignored Adam in yielding to Satan's temptation is that according to Genesis 3:6, Adam was with her when this happened. We tend to think of Adam as being absent, but the Bible says she gave the fruit "to her husband with her."

At this moment, Adam was being a passive non-leader, apparently failing to fulfill his role as the serpent tempted Eve. But instead of handing the leadership off to Adam and forcing him to take the lead, Eve took the lead and reversed the roles. When that happened, Satan had them.

The result, of course, was a curse on every aspect of creation, including the marriage relationship. God told Eve, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Genesis 3:16).

Some people take this to refer to a woman's sexual desire, but that's not what this means. The woman's desire would be to rule the man, and he would also desire to rule because he was made to rule. The result is what we call the battle of the sexes, with the woman rebelling against the man's attempts to exercise authority over her.

That battle is still going on today as a product of the curse. But when we come to Christ, we are redeemed from the curse. Satan doesn't want wives to know that they don't have to fight anymore for that position of headship. He doesn't want wives to discover that if they will honor God by respecting and submitting to their husbands, they can stop struggling to fill a position they were never designed to fill and begin enjoying peace in their hearts, even if their husbands don't respond properly to their submission.

### A WIFE'S TRUST IN GOD

But we need to say again that this doesn't just happen. The key to pulling this off, the motivation that led the holy women of old to reverence their husbands, is that they "hoped in God" (1 Peter 3:5). God wants to know if a woman trusts Him and really believes His Word.

Focusing your trust on the Lord means that you recognize there is something bigger going on here than your respect for your husband. The Bible tells wives to submit to their husbands "as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22).

You see, God overrules your husband in terms of authority. Here is the answer to those who think the biblical framework makes a man the absolute ruler in his kingdom, with his wife and children as his indentured servants. This is why a wife must go against her husband when he tries to make her do something that is contrary to God's clearly revealed will.

Now that is the exception, because Ephesians 5 goes on to say that a wife is to be subject to her husband "in everything" (v. 24). How can a wife do that? By putting her faith in the Lord and aligning herself with His established order.

I know at this point you might be saying, "Tony, I'm afraid to do that because I'm afraid my husband will take advantage of my submissive spirit." I hear what you are saying, and we're going to address that fear in a minute because God also hears what you are saying.

A wife's trust is to be in the Lord. It's one thing to trust when things are fine and a husband is fulfilling his roles as leader and lover. But it's another story altogether to trust God when the husband isn't doing his part. That's why a woman's eyes need to be on the Lord, not on her husband. Her perspective can make all the difference. With her faith in God, a wife can see things that others can't see. The definition of a spiritual man or a spiritual woman is not someone who does spiritual things like reads their Bible, prays, or goes to church. The definition of a spiritual individual is someone who sees things spiritually.

You may look at your husband, or look around you at other people, and say, "Submission doesn't make sense." But when you see things through the eyes of faith, life becomes clearer. You may not see in your husband what you want to see, but you'll never be disappointed if your eyes are on Christ.

## A WIFE'S SURRENDER TO GOD

There's no question that a woman surrenders some things when she gets married. She surrenders her family name, the financial and personal independence she had when she was single, and even her destiny to a large degree because her future is now inextricably tied to her husband's.

That's a problem to some women, because when their marriage doesn't turn out to be all that they thought it would be, they spend all of their time trying to get back everything they surrendered. And that means a battle.

As I deal with marriages like this, I often discover at least part of the problem is that the wife has never really given her husband honor—and I mean as a daily pattern, not as a once-in-a-while tip of the cap to his position.

Before you go to war to get back what you surrendered, consider what can happen when you make it a priority to honor your husband and willingly submit to him even when he is in the wrong. What can happen is that when you are lined up properly under God, you get yourself out of the way so God can deal with your husband.

But if you don't believe that God can reach your husband, you're going to keep putting yourself between your husband and God and block God's movement in his life. When you surrender, God takes over and fights the battle for you.

We find a classic illustration of this principle in the Old Testament story of Nabal, Abigail, and David in

1 Samuel 25. Nabal was a rich farmer whose men and livestock were guarded by David's men while David was on the run from Saul. But when David sent men to Nabal to seek supplies in appreciation of the men's defense of Nabal's property, Nabal treated them badly and insulted David, sending them away empty-handed and hungry.

David was ticked off and planned to kill Nabal for the insult and his refusal to give them what they needed. But Nabal, whose very name meant "fool," had a very wise wife named Abigail. As soon as she heard about the terrible thing her foolish husband had done, she took David a large supply of good things from the farm and pleaded with him not to carry out his plan and put a stain on his future kingship.

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David blessed God when he realized that Abigail had kept him from taking revenge on Nabal. Abigail saved Nabal's life, but the news of how close he came to dying caused Nabal's fool heart to go into cardiac arrest. He

died ten days later, and the Bible says that God struck him (v. 38).

The point is that Abigail did the right thing by pleading for Nabal's life even when he didn't deserve her intercession. Instead of adding to the problem, Abigail cleared the way for God to deal with her husband. And the end of the story is that Abigail went from being the wife of a fool to the wife of a king when David married her.

Peter had an example of godly surrender in mind when he wrote his first letter: "Just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord" (1 Peter 3:6a). Let's stop there.

When this passage is read people usually get hung up on the term "lord," which makes it sound like Abraham was some Middle Eastern sheik who expected everyone around him to bow and scrape. You may see that kind of thing on the old late-night movies, but that's not the case here.

This was a term of respect that Sarah used to honor Abraham. In other words, her respect was verbal as well as visual. She honored her husband in both word and action.

When you turn on the television, you don't want a picture without sound, or vice versa. Both sight and sound are needed to get the most out of a television. A wife's honor for her husband needs to be the same way.

Now if you know the story of Abraham and Sarah, you'll recall that Abraham didn't always deserve Sarah's respect. On two occasions, in Genesis 12 and 20, Abraham wimped out and lied to foreign kings about his relationship with Sarah when he thought his neck was on the line. Abraham's actions jeopardized Sarah's purity in each



case. God shut down two kingdoms to protect Sarah, and she still spoke to and treated Abraham with respect.

When God has a woman to work with who is willing to surrender to Him, He will move mountains and disrupt kingdoms when necessary to act on her behalf. But the biggest example of this in Sarah's life is not the two times I mentioned above, but the miraculous birth of Isaac.

Isaac's birth was a miracle because Sarah was ninety years old and Abraham was one hundred. God first told Abraham that he and Sarah were going to have a child, and Abraham laughed (see Genesis 17:15–17).

Then God came back later and told Abraham again that Sarah was going to have a son. This time, Sarah overheard the promise and laughed (Genesis 18:10–12). She laughed because Abraham was even older than she was and was in no condition to father a child. Sarah laughed because from a human standpoint having a child with Abraham was impossible.

In other words, Sarah wasn't laughing because she refused to believe that God could do the impossible. The Lord responded to her laughter by saying to Abraham, "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14).

That settled the issue for Abraham and Sarah. How do I know that? Because the author of Hebrews wrote, "By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised" (Hebrews 11:11).

What this tells us is that after a moment of understandable doubt, Sarah surrendered to the Lord and to

Abraham that day in her tent when she heard God's promise of the impossible. If you're a wife who is dealing with a seemingly impossible husband and an impossible marriage, maybe it's time for you to say to God, "Lord, even if this thing doesn't change, I'm going to stop doubting and start trusting You."

### THE FREEDOM OF SURRENDER

Now we're ready for what may be the best part of this whole issue of a wife's submission to and reverence for her husband. There is freedom from fear awaiting the woman who is willing to cast herself and her marriage upon the Lord.

For most of us, surrender and freedom don't go together. After all, what happens when a fugitive or a soldier surrenders? He loses his freedom and goes either to jail or to a prisoner-of-war camp.

But the reverse is true for a woman whose desire is to be a godly wife. When she makes the determination to surrender to God's plan by honoring and respecting her husband, she discovers true freedom. The second half of 1 Peter 3:6 says this: "You have become her [Sarah's] children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear."

What fear is this referring to? We alluded to it above. It's the fear of a wife who says, "I'm afraid to submit to my husband because I'm afraid he will take advantage of me and use my submission to lord it over me. So I'm going to

hold on to part of the control so he won't run over me."

This kind of reaction is very natural. It's scary for any of us to think about giving up control and surrendering our rights and our preferences to another person.

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But we're not talking about having a natural marriage here. We're talking about a supernatural marriage. Anyone can have a natural marriage, meaning one in which the husband and wife are in conflict and there is a constant battle for control involving "my rights and what I want."

But God has a word of assurance for a wife who is willing to do things His way. "You have nothing to be afraid of, because I see your heart and I know where you are. You are in My sight and in My care. I can deal with your husband if you will align yourself with My will."

Remember Sarah. She was tucked away in a tent in the middle of nowhere in a desolate land to which she had come with Abraham. She was married to a man who had his moments of weakness even though he was a great man of faith.

What's more, Sarah was far too old to have any hope of having a child, and Abraham was even older and less capable of fathering a child. But Sarah believed God could bring a baby out of two dead bodies. God saw Sarah's heart, He knew where she was, and she got her miracle.

You may say, "You've got that right. It would take a miracle for my husband to become the spiritual leader and understanding lover the Bible talks about. I want to see that happen, but I'm afraid to surrender."

God's answer is, "Do not be afraid. I see your heart, and I know where you are. Trust Me."

If your desire is to obey God by honoring your husband, you don't need to fear anyone or any situation. Don't let any fear keep you from experiencing God's best in your marriage. Be faithful and patient knowing that while you are trusting Him for a change in your marriage, He will change you to live well within it until the time comes for your miracle.

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